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My name is Mary Larson and I am an elementary school principal, and district Special Education Coordinator in Clinton County for Bath Community Schools. I have over 30 years in education as a classroom teacher, special education director and administrator. I have a passion for this particular legislation for a number of reasons. This is legislation that will protect ALL kids. Children who are teased or excluded because of their 'differences' are depending upon today's vote to protect them. This is especially true for our special education population as they are especially vulnerable to peer abuse. I am excited and pleased to see such important legislation in front of us today.

School districts across the state are struggling with this issue of bullying, as are parents, educators, and students alike. They are looking for guidance in defining the term, training staff to deal with it, finding strategies that work to diminish its occurrence and especially looking for language that will help them framework local procedures. The exciting thing about today is that we have the opportunity to help all of them. Local school districts look to state policymakers as a force for guiding them and fully recognize them as the policy making body. They are depending upon your vote today so they can move forward from here. Critics would want us to believe that such legislation hinders or removes local control. This bill is not only flexible but leaves total control to the local districts. This is important since I know my current district is very different from one in Wayne County for example. This flexibility also allows districts to 'tailor make' their regulations and procedures to better fit their communities, parents, staffs, and student population.

Such legislation will act as the impetus for educators of all types to address and act on the designated behaviors outlined in 1310b. While we all want to dismiss such behaviors as 'kids being kids' and/or want to believe in the world that you and I had 35 to 40 years ago, the fact is, bullying happens daily in our schools. It needs defining, it requires established guidelines and finally it needs procedures and regulations for helping educators deal with it. Bullying damages individuals, families, communities and systems. With this legislation, teachers will no longer be able to ignore such peer abuse and will be obligated to protect all kids. Most importantly, following district regulations, they will KNOW HOW to protect all kids.

I am asking that you pass this legislation for everyone's sake. I am asking that you pass this bill because we must protect every single child in Michigan schools today.

Mary Larson, M. S., Ed Principal, Bath Elementary School 13789 Webster Rd, Bath, MI 48808 517-641-6771